Educational Criteria in Forensics: An Argument for Lincoln-Douglas Debate

David E. Williams

David Williams (PhD, Ohio University, 1990) is assistant professor, Department of Communication Studies, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409.

As forensic educators set out each year to recruit new squad members, a few familiar phrases are echoed throughout colleges and universities across the country: "We can make you a more competent speaker," "we can teach you how to construct and deliver effective arguments," and "we can help you develop a new insight into literary excellence." We can rightfully boast the claim that forensics is one of the most worthwhile activities students can participate in during their college years. However, most forensic students limit their educational opportunity by participating in only individual events or debate. This essay will suggest initially that forensic students' educational benefits can be optimized by competing in both individual events and debate activities. Next, the paper will review the educational criteria of public address events and debate, and then demonstrate that Lincoln-Douglas [L-D] debate is an ideal complement to individual events programs. A final section will offer suggestions to help maintain the educational benefits that L-D presently offers debaters.

BENEFITS OF CROSSOVER PARTICIPATION

Students are generally drawn to forensics participation because of an affinity toward a specific event. Those who initially express an interest in debate can quickly get caught up in the activity to the point that participation in public address or interpretation events is unlikely. The same response can be seen by many who are initially drawn to individual events. Because of these tendencies, too many of our students miss out on the benefits of crossing over between individual events and debate. A survey of eight recent tournaments, attended by at least twenty schools each, reveals that teams have either a very high or very low crossover rate. The majority of teams entered in these tournaments had fewer than 15 percent of their students crossing
over between individual events and debate of any form.

The most obvious benefit of crossover is the increased development of communication skills that comes from practicing for significantly different events. Clearly, the research and analytical skills developed in debate are not found at an equal level in public address events. In like manner, the delivery skills prevalent in public address are typically not found in debate. The individual events student who begins competing in L-D will benefit from the need to prepare speeches, or cases, that will be thoroughly critiqued within the competition.

What is less recognizable, but just as valuable, is the insight to be gained from performing in front of different audiences. The problems of the forensic audience have been described as having a narrow focus (i.e. Haught, 1989). The crossover student can receive insight into different audiences. Judges who walk into public address rounds have a different mind set and expectations than judges in debate rounds. Even the same judge will likely have different philosophies for individual events and debate rounds. Students who crossover will be exposed to a greater variety of mind sets.

Finally, students might be able to grow as individuals through crossover participation in forensics. An observation of any large tournament frequently reveals at least two sub-cultures: debate and individual events. The groups appear to be different and interaction between the two is limited. The crossover student will be exposed to both sub-cultures and to a diversity of opinion and behaviors, and will discover what both groups have in common.

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES OF INDIVIDUAL EVENTS AND DEBATE

Several forensic scholars have established and reaffirmed a fairly standard set of objectives as a foundation for forensic activity in general and individual events in particular.

The primary objectives for individual events competition were developed at the Second National Developmental Conference on Forensics, and six standards for public address events were outlined. For some students, participation in individual events can
develop qualities, such as leadership skills, teamwork, and ethical responsibilities. However, the core of what every individual events program should be able to teach its students is compiled in the following six standards for public address:

1. The speaker's presentation should identify a thesis or claim for which the speech is developed.
2. The speaker's presentation should provide a motivational link (relevance factor) between the topic and the audience.
3. The speaker's presentation should develop a substantive analysis of the thesis using appropriate supporting materials.
4. The speaker's presentation should be organized in a coherent manner.
5. The speaker's main presentation should use language that is appropriate for the topic and the audience.
6. The speaker's presentation should be delivered using appropriate vocal and physical presentational skills.

Although five standards for oral interpretation were also developed, the focus of this essay is on public address and debate activities; therefore, oral interpretation criteria will not be addressed. These public address criteria are specific in prescription yet represent a general consensus of what individual researchers have suggested as goals or objectives for evaluation of individual events presentations, (e.g. Bartanen, 1981; Mills, 1989; Swanson, 1992).

Research since the Second Developmental Conference on Forensics revealed one other objective that should be used to evaluate the educational function of individual events. Mills (1989) and Dunlap (1989) both posited that individual events should reflect the concerns and developments within the discipline that houses the program. This educational function is best served when forensic students are allowed to train for and compete in events that require knowledge and skills in issues closer to the cutting edge of the communication discipline.

These seven objectives provide an excellent means for assessing the educational function of individual events. As long as coaches and directors teach these skills and principles, and our tournaments reflect their adoption, the individual events activities will meet their educational purpose. The same position holds true for debate.
Debate was founded on and is grounded in basic principles (Bartanen, 1981). Rohrer (1989) explains that:

Debate should focus upon a man's [sic] ability to understand himself and society by stimulating and channeling analysis of persons and circumstances involved in the communication process, providing resources concerning alternative 'avenues of the mind' in the form of persuasive strategies, (p. 13).

Within this conceptualization, researchers surveyed the practice of competitive, intercollegiate debate in order to construct principles for guiding the educational function of the activity (e.g. Aden, 1989; Bartanen and Frank, 1991; Marks and Pearce, 1971; Norton, 1982; and Ziegelmueller, Kay, and Dause, 1990).

The following aims were selected from the above sources to feature educational objectives that should guide competitive debate:

1. The debater should employ critical thinking skills.
2. The debater should demonstrate an ability to evaluate an issue from differing perspectives.
3. The debater should be able to build a case.
4. The debater should be able to determine relationships among arguments.
5. The debater should demonstrate the ability to arrange arguments and evidence in effective constructive or refutation patterns.
6. The debater should be able to defend a contention through the use of research and analysis.
7. The debater's presentation should be delivered with comprehensible vocal and physical presentation skills.
8. The debater should employ skills in argumentation and persuasion.
9. The debater should be able to determine weaknesses in opposing positions.
10. The debater should exhibit skills in cross-examination.

Forensic education reaches its optimal level when students are taught all of the skills addressed above. However, the time commitment and work load make it difficult for most students to compete in both individual events and traditional team debate. However, students can master these educational objectives when L-
D debate is introduced into forensic programs.

**Lincoln-Douglas Debate**

NFA L-D is one-person policy debate that uses the traditional stock issues of harm, inherency, and solvency. The affirmative plan should sufficiently prove how to solve the problem. In NFA L-D, topicality is a voting issue and the negative is allowed to offer a counter proposal. The format and speaking times for NFL L-D are as follows:

- Affirmative constructive: 6
- Negative cross-examination: 3
- Negative constructive: 7
- Affirmative cross-examination: 3
- Affirmative rebuttal: 4
- Negative rebuttal: 6
- Affirmative rebuttal: 3
- Preparation time: 4

Harris, Aden, Glauner, Olson, Minch and Reynolds (1992) explained that in NFA L-D "speeches should be pleasant, comprehensible, and persuasive in tone especially since not all judges will have traditional debate experience" (p. 3). These authors also note that "spread delivery" is "antithetical to the purpose and intent of this event" (p. 2). Although published research on NFA L-D is scarce, the practice of pleasant, comprehensible, and persuasive speech is adhered to in varying degrees by debaters. The degree ranges from a strong attempt to comply to an outright disregard for the regulation, which appears to differ from region to region and even debater to debater.

**Individual Events Objectives and NFA L-D Debate**

Students who typically compete in individual events hopefully develop skills in its essential educational objectives. However, the education of these students can be enhanced, as many of these same critical skills can be taught through participation in L-D debate. When students work on these skills in public address and debate, their acquisition of the skills is likely to be enhanced.
Two of the individual events criteria that can be taught in L-D debate focus specifically on the speaker-audience connection. Although L-D debate does not necessarily attract huge crowds from the general public, it addresses the need to teach students how to develop a motivational link between audience and oration and how to employ appropriate language for the topic and audience. Lincoln-Douglas policy debate also requires the debater to view the judge as one who has the well-being of all others to consider, which is similar to a policy-maker judge. Lincoln-Douglas debate also opens the possibility for non-debaters and non-forensic people to observe, enjoy, and understand the activity, which assumes the activity continues to require a normal rate in delivery.

The L-D debater is also taught to recognize the need to adapt language to the topic. As the topic is researched, the student learns to recognize and understand not only the terminology of important issues but also how to determine which philosophical, emotional, and logical approaches are most appropriate for the given situation.

The educational concern with developing a thesis, appropriate supporting material, and an organized presentation is also addressed by L-D debate. Lincoln-Douglas debate necessitates that students learn how to analyze a resolution and then to follow through with sufficient research to construct and defend affirmative and negative positions. Successful argumentation in L-D debate also requires the student to organize clearly the presentation for opponents, audience members, and judges. Because analysis and data-gathering stages are inherent to the event, L-D debate fulfills this educational objective.

As for delivery, the speaker should strive for clarity and persuasiveness in vocal and physical presentation. Most L-D debate coaches and students support the educational need for emphasis on delivery skills. This emphasis varies greatly between regions of the country and individual programs. However, the format of L-D debate provides the opportunity for coaches to emphasize this practice.

The final educational concern with individual events deals with the issue of whether forensics reflects developments within the communication discipline. Lincoln-Douglas debate provides an
ideal laboratory for forensic coaches to teach the most recent developments in argumentation, persuasion, credibility, and analysis of nonverbal cues, as well as other advances in communication theory and practice. The L-D debate format lends itself to the testing of recent developments in the discipline. Communication scholars who study argumentation and argumentativeness, for example, might be interested in studying the activity and those who are attracted to it (e.g., Colbert, 1993). Such research would build stronger ties between forensics and the rest of the communication discipline.

Participation in L-D debate allows students to learn skills and develop understandings that meet the public address, educational standards established to guide individual events coaches and participants. A variety of current formats function to teach students the ten educational objectives previously noted for debate. However, the student who crosses over between individual events and L-D debate can acquire skills in both areas. The following section will demonstrate that NFA L-D teaches many of the ten debate educational objectives.

**Debate Objectives in L-D Debate**

The blend of evidence and reasoning in L-D guides students to evaluate critically the arguments in the round. As well, the philosophical and theoretical approach that L-D takes toward a resolution enables debaters to look at arguments in light of classical stock issues, which furthers the critical thought processes of the debater. Although less evidence is utilized in L-D rounds than in many team-debate rounds, L-D debaters still critically evaluate the stock issues inherent in the event. Thus, L-D debaters develop critical skills that include determining weaknesses in an opponent's arguments, refutation, extension of arguments, and skills in cross-examination.

Organization is important in L-D debate because of the oratorical nature prescribed by the activity and because of the stock issues in policy debate. Lincoln-Douglas debate places a heavy emphasis on delivery skills, thereby forcing debaters to select the most appropriate arguments and to present them in an effective
manner. This concern places an emphasis on arrangement for maximum persuasive effect. L-D debaters likewise learn how to develop contentions and to perceive relationships between arguments. The nature of the event rewards students who excel in these areas. The comparative de-emphasis on research in L-D, as compared to team debate, does not imply that L-D debaters do no employ evidence to warrant their claims. In fact, skills in research are still necessary, for analysis and evidence is essential in L-D debate.

Lincoln-Douglas debate clearly addresses the concern for comprehensible vocal and physical presentational skills because judging in the event is based on overall persuasiveness that cannot occur without adequate skills in delivery. The concern with a rapid rate of speaking in other forms of debate is found much less frequently in L-D debate. Such a delivery is against the philosophy of the event, for it is not conducive to an effective presentation. Delivery is evaluated in a manner similar to extemporaneous and impromptu speaking events.

Coinciding with the importance of delivery is the emphasis on argumentative and persuasive skills in L-D debate. The event allows students to develop fewer arguments than are typically found in team debate, but these arguments are usually debated beyond initial claims. The L-D format allows enough affirmative and negative speeches in which arguments can be developed, challenged, and extended. The event also allows coaches to teach their students useful skills in argumentative structure and the use of effective persuasive appeals.

**SUGGESTIONS**

Many of the educational benefits that L-D can offer directors of forensics and their students are based upon the idea that the event focuses on developing argumentation skills that are directly transferable to professional occupations. The key to maintaining this focus is to adopt procedures that will prevent the event from developing in a manner inconsistent with its original purpose.

One step the entire forensics community can take is to view
L-D as a combination of individual events and debate. For programs with both IE and debate coaches, both coaches should provide instruction to L-D debaters. For single-coach programs, the coach should try to utilize the goals and purposes of both activities when coaching L-D participants.

Tournament directors can do more to help maintain the status of L-D. Some of the following suggestions have been implemented on a limited basis, and additional directors may wish to include these recommendations in their tournaments if they have not already done so. When selecting judges for the event, tournament directors could rely predominantly on individual events coaches. This will help ensure that most of those who judge the event will expect that the rounds should function in a manner that emphasizes clear argumentation, which is presented in an understandable manner. Those judges who are most qualified to judge extemporaneous and persuasive speaking would likely make excellent L-D judges. Tournament directors could even include a brief description of the event in an envelope with ballots that are given to L-D judges. Debate coaches would also make excellent judges, but former team debaters who are serving as hired judges might need to be reminded of the purpose of L-D.

People outside of the forensic community could also be asked to judge L-D rounds. Ideally, tournament directors could locate individuals at the university or in the local community who have an expertise in the L-D topic. University administrators could also be given the opportunity to judge L-D rounds. The use of non-forensic judges would help convey to students the importance of developing comprehensible arguments and of utilizing persuasive strategies.

Epstein (1992) has argued that parliamentary debate tournaments should include non-forensics experts to determine whether debaters are developing superior arguments and are using the best sources for the given topic. The same reasoning applies to judging L-D debate with the use of non-forensic, expert critics.

The additional benefits of using non-forensic people as judges are that members of the host school's administration and community will learn more about and appreciate the forensic program. Most educators in forensics would welcome the
opportunity for more positive recognition by the university and local community. Lincoln-Douglas debate is an ideal event to publicize forensics to others.

The use of lay judges raises a concern for the quality of evaluation and decision. This concern can be alleviated. Dean (1988) has recognized the need for judge's training to prevent typical problems that are encountered when non-forensic individuals judge at tournaments. Dean described how a judging workshop, taught for an hour before or on the day of the tournament, helped eliminate many difficulties and increased the quality of the tournament for both critics and contestants.

The benefit of L-D debate might be particularly appealing to smaller programs that have few debaters. Lincoln-Douglas debate allows individuals and an odd number of debaters to compete, as juxtaposed to team debating. L-D is also an affordable way to compete in debate as the entry fees are lower and the cost of research is significantly less.

The advent of parliamentary debate as a forensic activity has a strong potential for meeting the educational objectives outlined in this paper. The philosophy and guidelines of the event, as detailed by the National Parliamentary Debate Association and the American Parliamentary Debate Association, create a competitive environment that can appeal to students with a background in either public address or debate. Because parliamentary debate is relatively new, it was not included in this analysis. However, a future study might advantageously examine parliamentary debate with regard to the educational objectives of NFA forensic events.

This essay has argued that L-D debate could be an educationally beneficial supplement to many forensic programs. Lincoln-Douglas debate provides training and practice in adversarial speaking that cannot be gained in traditional individual events. As a welcome addition to forensic speaking, L-D debate can certainly strengthen programs and help forensic directors to fulfill their educational missions to their students.
REFERENCES


Perspective on individual events: Proceedings of the first developmental conference on individual events. Mankato, MN: Speech Department.